

March 16, 2007

EXHIBIT 6  
DATE 3/16/07  
SB 8-142

TO: House Judiciary Committee  
Re: Senate Bill 142

Dear Committee Members,

The Montana Nurses Association urges you to support SB 142 "An act creating the Montana Public Health Emergency Act...." This bill updates statutory language to provide for increased coordination of emergency services and streamlines the mobilization of health care workers in a state of emergency.

The response to Hurricane Katrina in 2005 underscored the need for immediate mobilization of health professionals in response to a public health emergency of unanticipated proportions. After Katrina, mobilization of health care professionals to the emergency area was delayed by processing restrictions. SB 142 addresses the process (Section 6 and 7) by which health care workers licensed in other states, but not licensed in Montana, may work in Montana in an emergency and provides for state immunity in this event. This clause is extremely important in responding to the emergency needs of the entire population and to the needs of demographic segments of the population, such as children and the elderly.

The definition (Section 2) of "public health emergency" as an occurrence posing a "high probability of death, long-term disability, and exposure to significant risk of substantial future harm" immediately identified SB 142 as legislation commanding the support of nurses. Nurses and many other categories of health care workers will be needed to respond to events with a substantial magnitude of health impacts.

Section 3, requiring a state level public health emergency plan to be incorporated in the existing state DES emergency plan, provides for coordination with other state, local, and tribal agencies. This acknowledges that emergency response may be local and specific but requires the coordination of resources, personnel and services to be responsive and effective. This bill does not dilute the authority of any jurisdiction, but provides for the coordination of effort needed to address public health emergencies of any scope or magnitude.

We respectfully urge your committee to give Senate Bill 142 a "do Pass" recommendation.  
Thank you

Respectfully submitted,

Shelly Meyer, RN,C.  
Public Health Nurse  
Member, Council on Practice & Government Affairs

*The Montana Nurses Association (MNA) is the state professional association for registered nurses. Its mission is to promote professional nursing practice, education and standards; represent professional nurses; and provide nursing leadership in promoting high quality health care. MNA joins with other professional associations and organizations on specific issues to support legislation that strengthens the quality of health care provided to Montana's citizens, and protects consumer health and safety. SB 142 deserves your positive endorsement to ensure the health and safety of all Montanans when Public Health emergencies arise.*